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DATABASE HIGHLIGHTS

Julia C. Peterson and Laurence R. Walton, Editors

Review of CAB International's CD-ROM Database AgECONCD

Judith M. Nixon

ABSTRACT. Researchers in the field of agricultural economics who search the agriculture and economics databases, will find this review of the subject specific CD-ROM database AgECONCD particularly helpful. Searching mechanisms, controlled vocabulary, record format, comparison to other databases, hit rates and pricing are all discussed. This is an excellent review of a new and unique resource for the field of agricultural economics.

Julia C. Peterson, MLS, and Larry Walton, MLS, are co-editors of this regularly appearing section on databases. Databases can include on-line, CD-ROM, micro-computer software, and files available on the Internet that relate to agriculture and food in their broadest sense. The editors would like to receive contributions for this column. For agricultural databases, please contact Julia C. Peterson, Director, Information Center, Cargill, Inc., P.O. Box 5670, Minneapolis, MN 55440. For food and nutrition databases, please contact Laurence Walton, Manager, Corporation Information Center, PET, Inc., 400 South 4th Street, St. Louis, MO 63102.

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Researchers in the agricultural economics field who have had to search the agriculture and economics databases, will welcome the news that there is now a CD-Rom database specifically designed to meet their needs. AgECONCD is part of the CAB Spectrum series of databases produced by CAB INTERNATIONAL. It specialized in the fields of agricultural economics including rural and agricultural development, environmental economics, forestry economics, and farm economics including the economics of pest control. It also covers the food industry, agricultural structure, employment and income, input industries, supply and demand, prices, food policy, marketing and distribution, international trade, finance and credit, rural sociology, and related education, extension and research.

AgECONCD does not correspond directly to a CABI printed abstracting source. Instead records come from a number of the CABI ABSTRACT journals. The database has over 240,000 records. A quick check indicated that over 154,000 of these records are from *World Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Abstracts*, which is about 62%. Other CABI ABSTRACT journals that are well represented in the database are *Rural Development Abstracts* with nearly 40,000 records and *Forestry Abstracts* with over 13,000 records. The remainder of the records were selected from over 27 other CABI ABSTRACT journals because of their relevance to agricultural economics.

Like other CABI products, it includes journal articles, books, conference proceedings, annual reports, dissertations, and government documents. Approximately 12,000 to 15,000 new records are added each year. Most records have English abstracts prepared by the CABI staff. Time span coverage is from 1973 to date with quarterly updates.

It utilized SilverPlatter's SPIRS™ (SilverPlatter Information Retrieval System) software which like all SilverPlatter products includes full Boolean logic. Terms and phrases can be entered and combined together with the Boolean "and," "or," and "not" connectors. The software supports nesting, so rather complicated searches can be performed in one step. Sets created can be combined together. The asterisk "*" is used for truncation. In addition there is a thesaurus and an index built into the system, so a searcher can browse through either of them and select terms to be searched.

The index lists all the words and phrases that are in the title, author, corporate author, author address, source, descriptor, abstract, geographic location, or CABI Abstracting journal fields. The thesaurus lists only the descriptors and their related terms and subheadings.

Each record has an average of five to six descriptors or subject headings assigned. Since 1984 the *CAB Thesaurus* has been used for vocabulary control. Descriptors can be single words or phrases. Descriptor phrases can be searched by using a hyphen between the terms, for example, marketing-policy. Since the thesaurus has only been used since 1984, to retrieve records between 1973 and 1983 it is necessary to use free text terms as well as descriptors. Searches can be limited to the descriptor field by adding the limiter "in de." For example: "marketing-policy in de" searches for records with marketing policy as descriptor. Latin or scientific names are used for organisms, but livestock and most common crops can be searched using English terms.

The publication type field (PT), publication year (PY) language field (LA), summary language (LS), and the geographic field (GE) are useful for narrowing searches. For example, a search could be limited to English language records only by typing "english in la" or "la-english." Data ranges can be entered as "py>1990" or "py-1994." Similarly a search could be limited to a specific country or geographic region such as Europe by typing "europe in ge." Indexing terms are assigned at the most specific level, so this search would not retrieve records that discuss particular European countries. To search for specific countries one would need to use the country such as "france in ge."

It is possible to limit a search to a specific publication type, although the procedure is a bit awkward. For example, to limit a search to journal articles you could choose the publication type "numbered part." In a search this would be entered as "numbered-part in pt" or "pt=numbered-part." Review articles, books, and conference papers and proceedings cannot be searched this way. Instead enter them as descriptors, i.e., "(conference or conferences) in de."

A very useful pseudo field has been created called the subject field. It combines the indexes for the descriptor field and the geo-

graphic field, so a search for "europe in su" would retrieve records with Europe in the descriptor or the geographic fields.

Even though the records in AgECONCD are pulled from several CAB databases, a search can be limited to a specific printed CABI abstract journal, such as *Weed Abstracts*. Each record indicates in the CAB field from which printed abstract it was taken and this field is searchable. For example to limit a search to the *World Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Abstracts* just type "Or in cab." Another easier way to do this is to use the index to identify the name of the abstracting journal and choose it. The manual which accompanies the CD-ROM lists the codes for the various CABI abstract journals.

Other fields that have specialized uses are the availability field (AV) which includes order numbers of *Dissertation Abstracts International*; the corporate author field (CA) lists the issuing agency if no personal author is given; the source field (SO) lists the titles of the journals or collective titles. A search could be limited to a specific journal by typing "journal of agribusiness in so."

Once a search is done, the results can be previewed. The user can choose to preview just the titles, citations or full records. Citations that are useful can be marked for printing or downloading to a diskette. The format for the output can be tailored to individual needs.

How does AgECONCD compare with other databases? To evaluate this question I did several searches in both AgECONCD and AGRICOLA limiting all searches to the same time span. One search was on guest farms or farm tourism. There was no overlap in records in records between the two databases. AgECONCD found nine citations between 1992 and 1994 and AGRICOLA identified two citations. Another search was on measurement or modeling of competitiveness or comparative advantage. Again there was very little overlap, only two citations appeared on both searches. AgECONCD retrieved twenty-four articles with 1993 as the publication year while AGRICOLA retrieved three records. The unique citation was not very relevant. In all the searches AgECONCD produced many more citations than AGRICOLA did. However, most of the citations from AGRICOLA were relevant and useful. It appears from this test searching that AgECONCD is a more productive

database for agricultural economics questions than AGRICOLA is. But for thorough and comprehensive searches both databases should be searched.

Since AgECONCD is a subset of CAB ABSTRACTS, libraries that already have CAB ABSTRACTS on CD-ROM will not need to purchase this new CD-ROM product. For those who only need the agricultural economics portion of CAB ABSTRACTS, AgECONCD is a significant savings. A single-user station for CAB ABSTRACTS is \$12,250 for the 1984 to 1992 portion of the database and \$8,000 for the 1993 to date portion. It is not available prior to 1984. The initial cost of AgECONCD is \$6,400 for a stand-alone, renewal cost is \$1,400 per year.

Clearly there are some advantages to the new subset of the CAB ABSTRACTS database for libraries that serve agricultural economics researchers. The first advantage is the narrower universe. CAB covers the very broad field of agriculture that means that searches, no matter how carefully constructed, retrieve records that are not related to economics. A narrower universe means more precise retrieval and faster searches. The broad time period is another major advantage. In order to get the same time coverage (1973-date) using the CAB ABSTRACTS database, you would need to search several disks and then go on-line for the 1973 to 1984 years.

Is it worth the price? The price for the first year of the subscription for a stand alone station (\$6,400) is quite a shock to any library acquisition budget. Pricing for networking is \$9,600 for two to four simultaneous users, and \$12,800 for five to eight users. After the first year the renewal price is more affordable: \$1,400 for stand-alone stations, \$2,100 for two to four users.

We have been previewing the CD-ROM for over a month. In general our researchers think it is a valuable resource. They like the speed and convenience of having all the agricultural economics citations since 1973 on one diskette. But, is this CD-ROM worth this price? We are still considering and looking for alternatives such as searching CAB ABSTRACTS through DIALOG's Classmate Program as a way of providing access to this material at a more affordable price.